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SALT violations, continued

Fresh evidence arrives almost daily that the Soviet Union is violating numerous and significant provisions of the SALT I and SALT II agreements.

A member of the Defense Intelligence Agency has told The Washington Times that the Soviets have constructed between 40 and 220 SS-16 mobile ICBMs now operational at the Plesetsk missile site.

The National Intelligence Estimate of Soviet Strategic Forces, as reported by John Lofton, states as an agreed U.S. intelligence judgment that "the Soviets will break out of the SALT I and SALT II agreements this year." The paper reveals that the Soviets will increase the number of MIRVed missiles to 920, overshooting the SALT II ceiling of 820 missiles by 12 percent in a single year.

These are just two more bits of evidence in a growing mound. The Kremlin, it seems, has violated the letter and spirit of SALT on every major provision, from ABM testing and construction limits to missile and bomber ceilings and non-interference with U.S. verification.

Most disturbing of all, information reaches us that the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency is about to declare that the Soviets are still "in fundamental compliance" with the SALT accords.

The report, for a congressional committee, will take note of the various allegations, but

dismiss them as either insignificant or unproven. It looks like the kind of cover-up the Republican platform of 1980 pledged to end.

It isn't all ACDA's fault, of course. Despite the heroic efforts of a handful of congressmen, both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Armed Services Committee have refused to open hearings on the matter. Despite its helpful attention to Soviet violations of other agreements — the chemical weapons ban and Cuban missile understanding, for example — the administration is still reluctant to give up publicly on Soviet good faith.

What ACDA needs is a clear directive from the White House to admit that the violations are violations. Convincing the public won't be easy. The president's critics will shout all the predictables; the cowboy, we'll be told, is just looking for an excuse to scuttle talks with the Soviets altogether. The president was insincere all along on arms control, they'll say. No matter how hard the evidence, the media organs of the Left will pronounce it not hard enough.

However, even the polls cited by the nuclear freeze lobby show that Americans do not trust the Russians to keep any agreement that isn't airtight — and SALT I and II are not. The evidence of Soviet violation must be examined with great care. If it holds up, though, the American people need to know.